

DELTA PROTECTION COMMISSION

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November 7, 1997

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director

Subject: Briefing on Status of Egeria Densa Control Program

Background

In February 1996, then Assemblymember Rainey wrote legislation to expand the authority of the Department of Boating and Waterways (DBW) over removal of exotic vegetation to include removal of Egeria densa (in addition to water hyacinth). At that time the Commission received a briefing on Egeria densa (see attached February 9, 1996 staff report).

At the June 27, 1996 meeting after receiving testimony and written letters of support, the Commission voted to support the pending legislation.

The legislation was approved by the legislature and signed into law on September 23, 1996. AB 2193 designates DBW as the lead agency, in cooperation with State, federal, and local agencies, to control Egeria densa in the Delta.

Removal Techniques

Two techniques have been studied for removal of Egeria densa: mechanical and chemical.

DBW's current pilot study focuses on mechanical removal, also called harvesting, to control Egeria densa. The benefits are the plant is physically removed from areas adjacent to pumps and areas where the stems may become entangled in boat engines. The downside of this technique is the plants may regrow.

Dr. Lars Anderson carried out research in 1993 and 1994 for US Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service using copper-containing material. The material must be placed in the water, in comparison to the materials used on water hyacinth, which is controlled by spraying the water hyacinth plant as it floats on the water surface. Dr. Anderson's research indicates that Egeria densa plants can only be killed by applying the

material through out the summer growing cycle. While Dr. Anderson's research projects did not harm fish or other native aquatic life, concerns have been raised about long-term or misuse of the copper-based material. In addition, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's Basin Plan for the Delta does not currently allow copper-based herbicides for control of aquatic weeds.

Status of the DBW's Egeria Densa Control Program

DBW inquired if the program mandated by AB 2193 requires compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In October of 1996, the Attorney General's Office advised DBW that the Egeria densa control program must comply with CEQA.

In December 1996, Department of Fish and Game advised DBW that there are a number of endangered species in the Delta area --both plants and fish, and DBW would have to enter into formal consultation as required under the Endangered Species Act. DFG staff recommended that pertinent biological data be gathered to properly evaluate the proposed Egeria densa control program. DBW's proposal was to proceed with a mechanical harvesting test program; that test program is now underway.

Department of Water Resources staff will prepare the environmental document for the DBW Egeria densa control program. The draft environmental document should be released in Spring of 1998.

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February 9, 1996

To: Delta Protection Commission
From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director
Subject: **Egeria densa**

Background:

At the last Commission meeting, the Commission received several letters from the public and a public comment asking the Commission's assistance in developing an eradication program for the aquatic plant *Egeria densa*. The Commission asked staff to prepare additional information about the plant, its impacts on the Delta and Delta activities, and what agency has authority or responsibility to eradicate the plant.

What is it?

Egeria densa is an exotic plant (not native) which grows underwater in a freshwater environment. The plant is native to South America. The plant is rooted in the bottom of the channels and grows upward toward sunlight. The plant does not emerge from the water. The characteristics of the plant is one slender main stem with "whorls" of small leaves every few inches. You have probably seen this plant in aquariums.

Where is it?

At this time the plant seems to be localized in the western area of the Delta, in Contra Costa County. As it is a freshwater plant, so it will not survive downstream. However, it could grow in other areas of the Delta if strands are brought into these areas.

When did the plant appear?

The plant has become a nuisance only in the last two to three years.

What are the problems?

The plants can grow in a very dense pattern, creating a "bed". This creates problems for recreational boating by catching on propellers, clogging waterways, and clogging intakes for engines and generators causing engines to overheat.

What is the methodology and cost for eradicating Egeria densa?

A researcher at U.C. Davis, Dr. Lars Anderson, has developed a program for removing the plant. Staff will present additional information about the methodology at the meeting.

Who has authority or responsibility to remove the plant?

Right now, no agency has been given responsibility over all exotic plant removal. The Department of Boating and Waterways in the Resources Agency has been given responsibility and funding for removal of water hyacinth only. Pending in the legislature is new legislation which would authorize Department of Boating and Waterways to assist in removal of "aquatic weeds", but only from lakes and reservoirs (see Exhibit A). The pending legislation includes no funding.